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History According to Hollywood

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By David W. Belin

As Academy Awards hype intensifies, Hollywood moguls are soliciting high schools and colleges across the country to acquire "study guides" and videocassettes of revisionist films about important historical figures and events. In essence, they are injecting a virus of lies into our nation's school system.

The trend began as part of the overall production of the Oliver Stone film "JFK." A study guide has been discussed for his newest film, "Nixon." The common denominator is falsification of facts, compounded by political bias inculcating our young people to believe that, generally, liberals are the "good guys" and conservatives, or "hard-liners," are the bad guys.

For instance, one important question addressed in "Nixon" concerns who was involved with the Central Intelligence Agency in the assassination plots against Fidel Castro—John F. Kennedy or Richard M. Nixon? The screenplay asserts that it was Nixon and that Kennedy was not involved. But the truth is otherwise, as I found out in 1975 when I served as executive director of the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (known as the Rockefeller Commission). When I first discovered possible incriminating evidence and confronted the CIA, it did everything it could to block this part of my investigation. The agency's rationale was that possible assassination plots did not constitute "activities within the United States."

Although Commission Chairman Nelson Rockefeller agreed with the CIA, my position was that if the CIA was working with members of the Mafia, it constituted a conspiracy "within the United States" and brought the matter within our jurisdiction. I persuaded a majority of the commissioners, including Ronald Reagan, to agree with me.

Once I broke through the CIA roadblocks, I found a sordid record. Although discussions within the CIA began in August 1960, in the waning months of the Eisenhower-Nixon administration, there is nothing to show any involvement of either Nixon or Eisenhower. What the record does show is that the commencement of implementation of CIA plots occurred after the election of President

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Kennedy, with the most intensive efforts occurring in 1962 and 1963.

Kennedy appointed Gen. Edward Landsdale to serve as the coordinating officer of what, in the words of Landsdale, "we called the Special Group." Landsdale said he specifically advised Kennedy that there be "an intermediary to whom I would report and, in turn, whom would report what I suggested directly to the president." The president appointed his brother Robert. According to Landsdale, the name of the group was then changed to the "Special Group Augmented," with the "Augmented" person being Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

In my interrogation of Landsdale, he initially claimed he did not know of any plans for the assassination of Castro and that Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who was also a member of the group, never discussed this. However, I uncovered from CIA files a smoking gun in the form of a written memorandum prepared by Landsdale and dated Aug. 13, 1962. It recorded highlights from a meeting of the Special Group Augmented on Aug. 10, 1962, in which a number of "alternatives" were discussed. There was a space where four words were whited-out. Further investigation showed these words were "including liquidation of leaders."

The reason these four words were whited-out is that a key CIA officer, William Harvey, who was present at the Aug. 10 meeting, called Landsdale's office after seeing the Aug. 13 memorandum and said that it was "stupid" to put in any memorandum the phrase "including liquidation of leaders." He recommended excising that phrase from all copies of the memorandum, and this is what Landsdale did.

I also uncovered an Aug. 14 memorandum sent by Harvey to Richard Helms, who was then the CIA Deputy Director of Plans, which stated in Section 3: "The question of assassination, particularly of Fidel Castro, was brought up by Secretary McNamara at the meeting of the Special Group (Augmented) in Secretary Rusk's office on 10 August. It was the obvious consensus at that meeting, in answer to a comment by Ed Murrow [the journalist, then serving as director of the U.S. Information Agency], that this is not a subject which had been made a matter of official record."

When I interrogated Mr. McNamara in 1975 about these matters, he claimed that because of all of the pressures that fell upon him as secretary of defense during the Vietnam War, he had lost all recollection of events that had taken place during these years. (Miraculously, his memory has since returned.)

Robert Kennedy was not at the Aug. 10 meeting. However, Mr. Harvey told me there was "tremendous pressure" from the Kennedys to "get rid of Castro." Others confirmed this. There are other documents that specifically showed Robert Kennedy was aware of these plots, and there was general agreement that what Robert Kennedy knew was communicated to his brother. On the other hand, there is nothing in the CIA files that showed that Richard Nixon had any involvement in these plots.

Mr. Stone's revisionist history, evidenced by his false accusations of Nixon's complicity in the CIA plots against Castro, while specifically exculpating Kennedy, is a continuation of the same patterns that formed the foundations of "JFK," where Mr. Stone falsely blamed the assassination of President Kennedy on the CIA, the Defense Department and President Johnson. The real culprit, of course, was Lee Harvey Oswald, an avowed Marxist.

Mr. Stone and his compatriots defend their conduct under the rationale that this is "interpretation" or "artistic license." And, of course, members of the Hollywood establishment are free to give their Academy Awards to whomever they please based on "artistic merit." But in an age when young people gain much of their understanding of history from movies, entertainment industry leaders have a moral obligation to avoid major distortions of facts in films such as "Nixon" and "JFK," which purport to tell the truth about important historical figures or events.

Mr. Belin served as counsel to the Warren Commission in 1964 and as executive director of the Rockefeller Commission investigating the CIA in 1975.